

VOTE - Voter Outreach Through Education Washington Secretary of State

WASHINGTON STATE CURRICULUM GRADES 8-12 STUDENT HANDOUT, LESSON 7

THEME: INVOLVEMENT - WALKING THE WALK; TALKING THE TALK

"And so, my fellow Americans: ask not what your country can do for you - ask what you can do for your country."
(President John F. Kennedy, 1961)

Kennedy's admonition to get involved for the sake of democracy still rings true. It summons each of us who share the "blessings of liberty" to give something back by contributing to the democratic process. But how? Is it by becoming informed on issues and candidates? Is it by helping in a campaign or expressing views?

The first step in "walking the walk" of civic involvement is to realize that there are numerous political parties, organizations and Internet resources in place just waiting for you. Getting connected to these is just a click away.

ACTIVITY: ONE

Go to www.vote.wa.gov. In the upper left, find "Elections Menu" and scroll your cursor down to "Contacts." When the menu appears to the right of "Contacts," click on "Political Parties." You will see the list of political parties in Washington State and the numerous options you have for connecting with them. Now you can answer or complete the following questions?

Questions:

1. Under state law, a ____ party is a political party of which at least one nominee for President of the United States, United States Senator, or a statewide office received at least ____ percent of the total election vote cast at the last preceding general election held in an even-numbered year.
2. What are the names of the major political parties in Washington State? _____
The list of political parties provides opportunities for you to explore their philosophies and issues and to get involved.
3. What are the names of two political parties that are unfamiliar to you? Do they have web sites or email addresses? _____
4. What are at least five ways to join in support of your favorite candidate or issue? Two are already given as examples.
 - A. Creation of signs
 - B. Sending postcards to friends or family
 - C. _____
 - D. _____
 - E. _____
 - F. _____
 - G. _____

As you can see, democracy is a do-it-yourself project in which getting involved is both the price and the payoff.

ACTIVITY: TWO

Citizenship and involvement in the democratic process means that you will encounter a "new" vocabulary. There are many terms used in political discussions, the news, and in voter materials that may be confusing. To understand the terminology would help you "talk the talk" and thus you could more knowledgeably participate. This next activity will review some of the basic vocabulary of elections and the voting process.

Read each section (A-D) carefully. After each section, complete its associated activity that immediately follows. When you have completed all four sections, your teacher will give you the chance to demonstrate how well you learned the information.

Section A

The terms in this section are used when talking about voting itself, including registration, becoming informed, and the hardware used to vote and then tabulate the results:

Absentee Ballot - Voters who will be absent from their communities, a resident in a healthcare facility, voters otherwise unable to vote in person, or voters who simply choose to do so may request an "absentee ballot" from the county elections office.

Ballot - The official list or paper of all candidates and issues upon which a voter is entitled to vote in an election. You receive the ballot at your polling place or in the mail when you do absentee voting.

Ballot Card - Any type of card or piece of paper on which a voter may record his or her choices that is to be tabulated on a vote tallying

system.

Chad - A term made famous by the November 2000 presidential election. A chad is the tiny piece of ballot material that may remain hanging on a punch card ballot when a person punctures it to cast a vote.

Direct Recording Electronic (DRE) Voting Equipment - Also known as touch screen machines, this type of voting equipment projects the ballot on a computer screen in front of the voter. To cast a vote for a given candidate or issue, the voter touches the screen in the appropriate place.

Local Voters' Pamphlet - A guide produced by a county or a city that provides information about ballot measures, candidates and other election information that pertains to county or city choices.

Motor Voter - The nickname for the National Voter Registration Act of 1993. The state of Washington passed a law in 1990 allowing residents to obtain voter registration materials as they apply for a driver's license as well as when they utilize certain other public services.

Optical Scan Ballot - A paper ballot that requires voters to use a special marking device to either fill in a bubble or connect two arrows in order to cast a vote. Once the ballots are marked, they are inserted into a special counting machine that reads the markings and tabulates the votes.

Polling Place - The place where you vote on Election Day (polling means voting).

Poll-site Ballot Counting Devices - A device programmed to accept voted ballots at a polling place for the purpose of tallying and storing the ballots on the day of the election.

State Voters' Pamphlet - A guide produced by the state that provides information about ballot measures, state candidates and other election information.

Voting - Making your choices of candidates and voting "yes" or "no" for any questions on the official ballot.

Voting Hours - When you can vote on an Election Day. Polling place hours are 7:00 a.m. to 8:00 p.m.

Review Questions:

Now, test yourself on the terms you just learned with the following:

1. Voters who will be absent from their communities, a resident in a healthcare facility, voters otherwise unable to vote in person on election day, or voters who simply choose to do so may request an _____ from the county elections office.
2. A guide produced by a county or a city that provides information about ballot measures, candidates and other election information that pertains to county or city choices is a _____ Voters' Pamphlet.
3. 7:00 a.m. to 8:00 p.m. on election day are the _____.
4. The nickname for the National Voter Registration Act of 1993 is the " _____ " law because it allows residents to obtain voter registration materials as they apply for a driver's license.
5. The official list of all candidates and issues upon which a voter is entitled to vote at an election is called the _____.

Section B

This section contains some political terms that relate to candidates, issues and the various types of elections you may encounter.

Blanket Primary - A primary in which each voter's ballot lists every candidate regardless of party affiliation and which allow the voter to choose freely among them. Thus, a voter may vote for the Libertarian candidate for governor, the Republican candidate for Secretary of State, and the Democratic candidate for Attorney General.

Bond Election - An election to authorize a jurisdiction (e.g. city, county, state) to enact a tax to repay the purchase of bonds for public projects like a new school.

Closed Primary - A primary in which only a political party's members may vote on its nominees. This is not true in Washington State.

Federal Voting Assistance Program (FVAP) - The Federal Voting Assistance Program is the federal office within the Department of Defense responsible for administering the Uniformed and Overseas Citizens Absentee Voting Act (UOCAVA). That law requires states and territories to permit members of the Armed Forces and certain U.S. citizens living abroad to register and vote absentee in elections for Federal office.

General Election - The election held the first Tuesday after the first Monday in November of each year.

Initiative - A power granted to voters in our state to introduce a matter before the Legislature or to place it directly before the voters for their approval.

Levy Election - A tax (amount of money) to be voted on at an election, for example, a levy to fund public schools.

Majority - Also known as simple majority, a number that is over 50% of the votes cast.

Measure - A question or proposal submitted in an election to obtain the voters' will on the matter, sometimes called a proposition.

Plurality - A number that is greater than other options in a list but less than a simple majority. For example, if candidate X got 48% of the vote while candidates Y and Z each got 26%, X won a plurality of votes.

Primary -- The process that reduces the field of candidates for advancement to the general election. The finalist of each party who win the Primary will run against each other in the General election.

Referendum - A power granted to voters in our state to either vote on a matter referred to the people's will by the Legislature or to override a law passed by the Legislature.

Supermajority - A requirement of more than a simple majority for certain special elections such as school levies which require a 60% majority of "yes" votes.

Review Questions:

Now, test yourself on terms from Section B.

1. An election required to be held on a fixed date in November recurring at regular intervals is the _____ election.
2. A _____ is a way to raise money for public projects like a new school, if approved by a vote of the people.
3. A power granted to voters in our state to introduce a matter before the legislature or to place it directly before the voters for their approval is an _____.
4. Winning by a number that is greater than others in a list but less than a simple majority is called winning by a _____.
5. A power granted to voters in our state to either vote on a matter referred by the Legislature to the people's will, or to override a law passed by the Legislature, is called a _____.
6. A question or proposal submitted in an election to obtain the voters' will on the matter, sometimes called a proposition, is a _____.
7. The process that reduces the field of candidates for public office in advance of the general election is called the _____.
8. When a candidate or a measure receives over 50% of the votes cast the result is called a _____.

Section C

The following are terms that relate to running for office:

At-large - Candidates for certain types of offices, such as a city council, are elected in one of two ways. They may be elected to represent certain geographic areas within the jurisdiction, such as a district or a ward. In such an election, sometimes only the residents of that geographic area may vote for that official. If a candidate is elected at-large, however, he/she is elected to represent all residents of the jurisdiction. All eligible voters in the jurisdiction may vote for him/her, regardless of their place of residency within the community.

Candidate - One who seeks or is nominated for an office; also called a nominee.

Certification Dates - Before election results become valid, a County Auditor or Secretary of State has a specific date to certify (approve) the results.

Constituency - A body of voters having the right to take part in the election of a candidate or group of candidates. These are the people that the official represents.

County Auditor - The county officer having the responsibility to maintain voter registration and to conduct state and local elections.

Filing Fee - A fee paid at the time a candidate files a declaration of candidacy in order to be placed on a ballot.

Filing Period - A time period used to file declarations of candidacy.

Gubernatorial - Refers to the office of governor, the chief executive officer of a state.

Inauguration - The act of officially bestowing an elected office on the winner of that race. This is the day the term of office begins.

Incumbent - The person who presently holds an office, either by election or appointment.

Independent - A candidate or elected official not affiliated with a political party.

Judicial Offices - Offices relating to courts of law or the administration of justice. In this state there are, for example, elected Municipal (City), District, Superior, Appeals and Supreme Court Judges.

Major Political Party - A political party of which at least one nominee for President/Vice President, US Senator or a statewide office received at least five percent of the total votes cast at the last preceding state general election in an even-numbered year.

Non-partisan Offices - Certain elective public offices are filled on a non-partisan basis, which means that the candidates vie for the position without any indication of a political party affiliation.

Office - A specific position to which people seek election. Each office has specific duties, terms and powers.

Partisan Office - Certain elective public offices are filled on a partisan basis, which means that the candidates vie for the position on the basis of political party affiliation.

Platform - The set of principles and positions on issues that a candidate or political party endorses as part of a campaign. It's what they "stand for."

Political Action Committee (PAC) - A business, union, or organization forms such committees to contribute funds to a candidate or issue.

Political Party - A group that shares the same views about government and works together to win elections.

Running Mate - When two candidates run for office as a team, as in the case of the President and Vice President of the U.S., each is called the other's "running mate."

Statewide Office - An elected position that serves the state as a whole. Examples include Governor, Lieutenant Governor, Secretary of State, Auditor, Treasurer, Attorney General, Superintendent of Public Instruction, Public Lands Commissioner, Insurance Commissioner and Supreme Court Judges.

Write-Ins - Names that are not included in the official ballot but are written by voters in the act of voting.

Review Questions:

Let's review the terms from Section C.

1. One who seeks or is nominated for an office is a _____ or a nominee.
2. This term refers to the office of governor, as in a _____ candidate.
3. Certain elective public offices are _____ offices which means that the candidates run for the position on the basis of political party membership.
4. The _____ is the person who presently holds an office, either by election or appointment.
5. A group that shares the same views about government and works together to win elections is called a _____.
6. A candidate not affiliated with a political party is said to be an _____ candidate.
7. A _____ is what we call the set of principles and positions on issues that a candidate or political party endorses as part of a campaign.
8. Names that are not included on the official ballot but are added by a voter in the act of voting are called _____.
9. A time period (generally one week) used to register for a political contest is called the _____ period.
10. An official's _____ is the body of voters having the right to take part in the election of a candidate.
11. Committees formed by business, organizations or unions to contribute funds to a candidate or issue are called _____ Committees.

Section D

There is political activity at various levels of government, from your neighborhood to the nation's capital. Certain terms are used to describe these levels or political subdivisions.

Precinct - The smallest geographical subdivision for voting purposes. This is essentially your neighborhood. You vote at your precinct's polling site when you vote in person. It is also the level for meeting with neighbors (a caucus) who support the same political party to discuss issues and candidates and recommend a platform for that party.

Polling Place - The place where you vote on Election Day (polling means voting). One polling place (site) will often accommodate several polling stations for many precincts.

District - A subdivision of the state or of a county, city, village, or other unit of local government in which all registered voters residing within the district are entitled to participate in the election of any one or more candidates or in the determination by election of any matter.

City - Political subdivision of a county that has elected leadership like a Mayor.

County - Political subdivision of a state composed of cities and rural areas that has elected leadership like Commissioners or Council Members.

State - One of 50 political subdivisions of the U.S.

Region - A geographic and sometimes political area combining several states. An example would be the Pacific Northwest Region of Washington, Oregon and Idaho.

Nation - A political entity of the country as a whole as in the 50 United States.

Review:

Put the following political subdivisions in ascending order from most local to most global or distant:

Listed out of order: Precinct, State, City, County, Nation

Your list in corrected order:

1. _____ 2. _____ 3. _____ 4. _____ 5. _____

ACTIVITY: THREE

Go to www.vote.wa.gov and under "Elections Menu" scroll down to "More Information." When the submenu appears, click on "Glossary." Terminology that begins with the letter "A" is already open for you. Find the alphabet in the upper-left corner and click on the letters "C," "L" and "V " (in that order) to answer the following:

QUESTIONS:

1. What is the term for the process of examining ballots or groups of ballots, subtotals, and cumulative totals in order to determine the official returns of, and prepare the certification for, a primary or general election? _____
2. To _____ is to attempt to influence politics in favor of a special interest.
3. The number of people who voted in an election is called the _____. It's often expressed as a percentage of registered voters who cast ballots.
4. Since election night voting results are unofficial, how many days have to pass for the results to be final for a primary? _____. How many days are needed to certify a general election? _____
5. What ballots are still accepted and tabulated after election day? _____
6. Who is in charge of examining the ballots and vote totals in order to determine the official returns for an election? _____
7. If the difference between the top two candidates is fewer than 2000 votes and less than one-half of one percent of the total, what is mandatory after an election? _____

ACTIVITY: FOUR

One special advantage of democracy is the CHOICES that we have as voters. Those choices can create a little confusion sometimes when it comes to the plethora of elected offices and their length of terms and how often an election has to occur for each office. This activity is to help you sort through the maze that is called the "Election Cycles."

Offices listed below start closest to home and work outward to national offices. They are grouped by each office's respective term lengths. At the end of each term the incumbent would have to seek re-election to retain that office unless there is a limit on terms for that elected position.

Read the following lists of elected offices and their terms and then complete the activity that follows:

The following offices have 2-year terms:

Precinct Committee Officer
State Representative
U.S. Representative

The following offices have 4-year terms:

City Mayor

City Council Member
Municipal Court Judge
County Sheriff
County Auditor
County Clerk
County Treasurer
County Prosecuting Attorney
County Assessor
County Coroner
County Commissioner/Councilor
County District Court Judge
County Superior Court Judge
State Senator
State Insurance Commissioner
State Commissioner of Public Lands
State Superintendent of Public Instruction
State Attorney General
State Auditor
State Treasurer
Secretary of State
State Lieutenant Governor
State Governor
U.S. President (limited to 2 terms total, consecutive or split, by the 22nd Amendment)

The following offices have 6-year terms:

(Some) County Public Utility Commissioner
County Drainage District Commissioner
(Some) Fire District Commissioner
State Court of Appeals Judge
State Supreme Court Judge
U.S. Senator

For this activity, you will need a piece of paper, colored markers and pens or pencils. Using the theme of "election CYCLES," create a drawing that depicts these various offices and their length of terms. Use the imagery of a bicycle, tricycle or other "cycle" to convey as much of the information as you can, including what level the offices are (local, state or national.) As you create this cycle, don't worry if you are not an "artist." When finished, you will share your creation with the class and explain the symbolism you used to organize and convey the information. You may be asked to demonstrate your retention of the offices and their term lengths at the end of the activity.

Congratulations are in order when you complete this entire lesson. You have learned not only some ways to "walk and talk" in the world of elections but also some resources with which to further inform yourself in the future.